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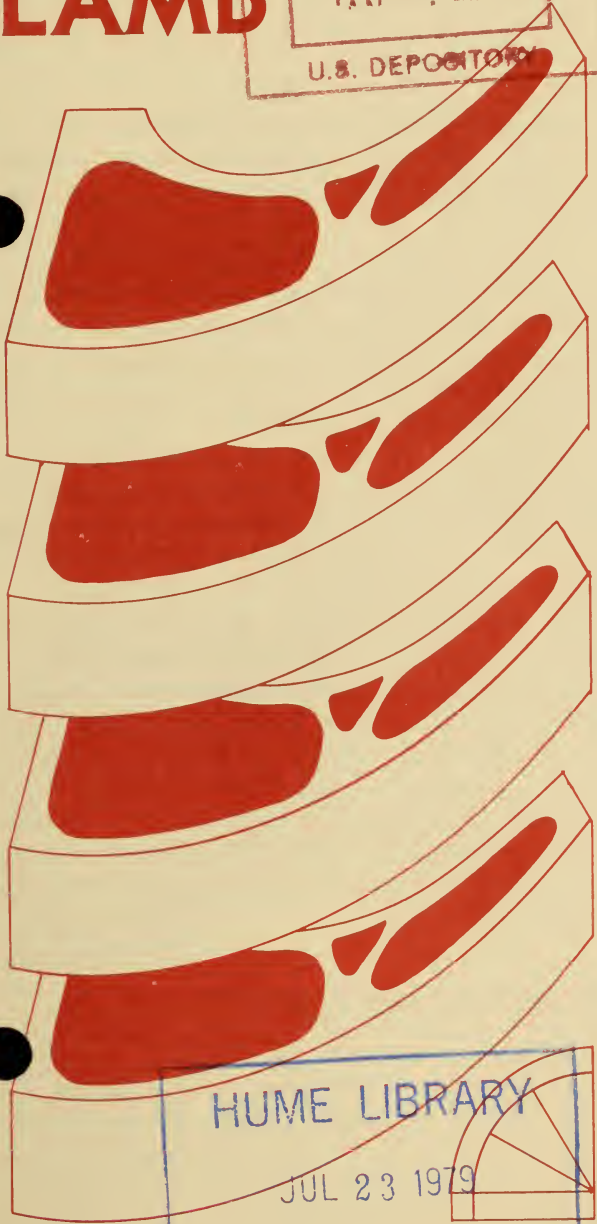
# HOW TO BUY

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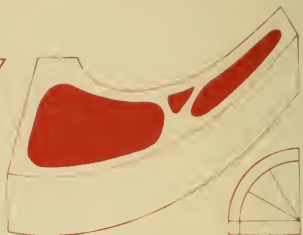
HOME AND  
GARDEN BULLETIN  
NUMBER 195

PREPARED BY  
FOOD SAFETY  
AND QUALITY  
SERVICE

AS

# HOW TO BUY

## LAMB



Who can resist barbecued shish kabobs, sizzling lamb chops, or roast leg of lamb? Many Americans enjoy the variety and flavor of this tender meat.

Lamb is tasty and nutritious too. One three-ounce serving of roast leg of lamb provides one-third of the U.S. Recommended Daily Allowance (U.S. RDA) for protein and one-fourth the U.S. RDA for niacin and zinc. It also supplies some phosphorus, iron, and B vitamins.

Since lamb is usually tender and delicately flavored, you can prepare it many ways. Most of the cuts you buy may be cooked by dry-heat methods such as broiling, frying, or roasting. Lamb is best when served hot.

In the past, shoppers looked for the term “spring lamb” to insure that the meat would be young and tender. Today “spring lamb” includes all lambs born between March and October, so it covers most of our domestic supplies.

But you do have a reliable guide to tenderness—the USDA quality grades. By choosing the appropriate cut and USDA grade for the recipe you are using, you’ll find it easy to liven up your meals with lamb.

## ABOUT LAMB QUALITY

Lamb is usually tender because it is from animals less than one year old, but quality can vary. The USDA quality grades—Prime, Choice, Good, Utility, and Cull—are reliable guides to lamb tenderness, juiciness, and flavor. The grades are based on nationally uniform Federal standards, so that USDA Choice lamb chops, for example, will provide the same good eating no matter where you buy them.

In addition to lamb, USDA has grades for yearling mutton, which is meat from sheep one to two years old, and for mutton, which is meat from older animals. However, you seldom find graded yearling mutton and mutton in retail stores.

Lamb carcasses also may be graded for yield of trimmed retail cuts. Yield Grades 1 through 5 denote, chiefly, the ratio of lean meat to fat. Yield Grade 1 means the highest yield of trimmed retail cuts, and Yield Grade 5 the lowest. When you're buying retail cuts, you don't

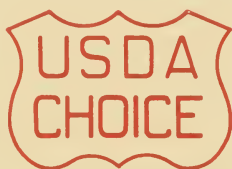


need to be concerned about the yield grade because most retailers closely trim the cuts, eliminating the variation in fatness which the yield grades identify. Knowing the yield grade would be helpful if you're buying larger cuts or an entire carcass for your home freezer.

Although little lamb is graded for yield, the service is available, and you may find the yield grade shield on larger wholesale cuts.

Imported lamb is not graded for quality or yield by USDA, since it is usually imported frozen and only fresh meat can be graded. However, imported lamb must be inspected for wholesomeness by a system approved by USDA and must bear the inspection legend of the exporting country.

## HOW LAMB IS GRADED



Meat grading is a voluntary service provided by USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service (FSQS) to meat packers and others who request it and pay for it. Approximately two-thirds of all lamb produced is graded for quality. The grading is done by highly trained USDA graders.

Only whole carcasses or wholesale cuts are graded for quality since quality differences are difficult or next-to-impossible to recognize in retail cuts. When the carcass is graded, a purple shield-shaped grademark containing the letters

USDA and the grade name—such as Prime or Choice—is applied with a roller-stamp. The grade shield is rolled in a ribbon-like imprint along the length of the carcass and across both shoulders. Then when the carcass is divided into retail cuts, one or more of the grademarks should appear on most of these cuts.

Only lamb which has first passed a strict inspection for wholesomeness may be **graded for quality**. So you may be sure when you see the grademark that the meat also came from a healthy animal and was processed in a sanitary plant.

## INSPECTION FOR WHOLESOMENESS



All meat must be inspected for wholesomeness, by either State or Federal inspectors. Meat processed in plants selling their products across State lines must be federally inspected to see that it is clean, wholesome, unadulterated, and truthfully labeled. However, meat processed in plants which sell their products only within the same State may be State inspected in any State having an inspection system equal to the Federal. Otherwise, such meat must be federally inspected. Federal inspection is another service provided by FSQS.

Meat which passes the USDA inspection for wholesomeness is stamped with a round mark which bears the legend "U.S. INSP'D. & P'S'D." This mark is placed only once on wholesale cuts so that you are likely to see it only on large cuts.

of meat. Packaged meat foods, however, such as frozen dinners and canned meats, that are sold in interstate commerce, carry the USDA inspection mark on the label.

Learn to recognize both the inspection mark—a circle—and the grademark—a shield. Remember they mean different things. The inspection mark tells you that the meat is **clean** and **wholesome**. The grademark tells you the **quality** of the meat.

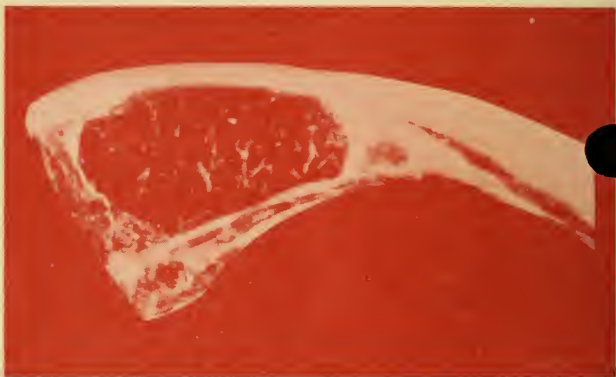
## LOOK FOR THE GRADE

Each USDA lamb grade is a measure of a distinct level of quality. Five grades span the range of quality—Prime, Choice, Good, Utility, and Cull. Good, Utility, and Cull grades are seldom sold as retail cuts.

USDA Prime is the most tender, juicy, and flavorful, but the grade most widely sold at retail is USDA Choice. Choice lamb is produced in the greatest volume and retailers have found that this quality pleases most of their customers.

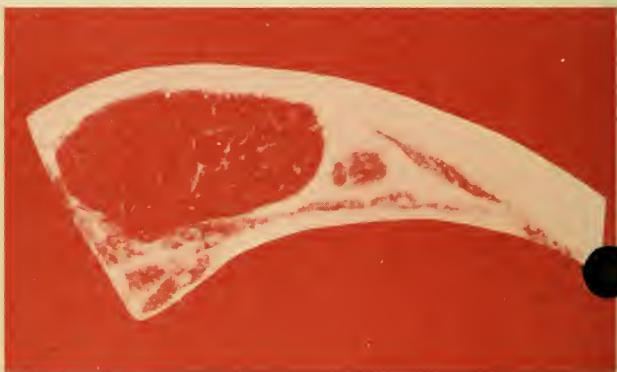


The grades are based on factors which are indications of marbling—flecks of fat within the lean. The marbling or fat content in the lean of Prime grade lamb amounts to 4 to 5 percent, and in Choice grade lamb, 3 to 4 percent.



## **USDA PRIME**

Prime grade lamb is very tender, juicy, and flavorful. It has generous marbling, which enhances both flavor and juiciness. Prime chops and roasts are excellent for dry-heat cooking—broiling and roasting. Prime grade lamb is not carried widely at the retail level.



## **USDA CHOICE**

Choice grade lamb has slightly less marbling than Prime. Like Prime, Choice chops and roasts are very tender, juicy, and flavorful and are suited to dry-heat cooking.



## LOOK FOR THE CUT

Regardless of their quality grade, some cuts of lamb are naturally more tender than others. Cuts from the less-used muscles along the back of the animal—the rib and loin sections—will always be more tender than those from the active muscles such as the shoulder, flank, and leg.

The most tender cuts make up only a small proportion of the lamb carcass—and they are in greatest demand. Therefore, they command a higher price than other cuts.

Consistently tender lamb cuts include the sirloin chop or steak, the loin chop, loin roast, rib chop, and rib roast. You will find that most cuts of USDA Prime and Choice lamb—including shoulder cuts—are tender and can be oven roasted, broiled, or pan-broiled. A leg of lamb graded Choice or Prime, for example, is a delicate delight when oven roasted.

The less tender cuts—the breast, riblets, neck, and shanks—can be braised slowly to make excellent (and tender!) lamb dishes.

The best way to identify lamb cuts is with the standard terminology shown on the following pages. These terms are generally recognized throughout the meat industry.

Illustrated on the following pages are the most widely sold and widely known retail cuts of lamb, along with descriptions of the cuts and suggested cooking methods.



# LAMB



Sirloin Half of Leg



Shank Half of Leg



Leg, Sirloin on



Leg Chop (Steak)



Leg, Sirloin off

## LEG

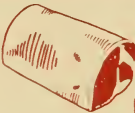


Sirloin Roast



Sirloin Chop

## SIRLOIN

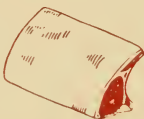


Loin Roast



Loin Chops

## LOIN



Rib Roast



Rib Chops

## HOTEL RACK



Square Shoulder



Arm Chop



Blade Chop



Neck Slices

## CHUCK



# CHART

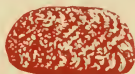


Hind Shank

## HIND SHANK



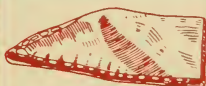
Lamb for Stew\*



Ground Lamb\*

\*LAMB FOR STEW, GRINDING OR CUBING MAY COME FROM ANY WHOLESALE CUT

## FLANK



Breast

## BREAST



Fore Shank

## FORE SHANK

## RETAIL LAMB CUTS

**RIB CHOPS** Cut from the rib (rack), these tender chops (on the left in photo) are delicious broiled, pan-broiled, or panfried. For best results, have rib chops cut **at least** 1 inch in thickness. Approximate cooking time for 1 inch—12 minutes; 1½ inches—18 minutes; and 2 inches—22 minutes.



**LOIN CHOPS** One of the most popular of lamb cuts, loin chops (on the right in photo), can be easily identified by the T-bone. These chops are delicious when broiled, pan-broiled or panfried. Cooking time is the same as for rib chops.



**SIRLOIN STEAKS or CHOPS** Cut from the sirloin section of the lamb leg, these chops can also be broiled, pan-broiled, or panfried. Follow cooking suggestions given for rib and loin chops.

**LEG OF LAMB** Since the leg of lamb is often too big to fully use, sirloin chops can be cut from the sirloin section of the roast, and the remaining portion prepared as an oven roast.



The **French-style leg** has a small amount of meat trimmed from the end of the shank, and the exposed bone can be decorated after roasting.



The **American-style leg** differs from the French-style in that the shank bone has been removed and the shank meat folded back into a pocket on the inside and fastened with skewers.



The **sirloin half/leg** of lamb (butt half) is the upper half of the leg—usually with the sirloin on. This cut makes a delicious oven roast.

The **shank** or lower half of the leg (see identification chart) is often merchandised separately. It is sometimes sold at a slightly higher price than the butt half because it yields more meat. Whenever the shank and butt are sold at the same price, the shank half of the leg is the better value.

For **any** leg roast weighing 5-8 pounds, allow approximately 35 minutes per pound in a 325° F. oven. The meat thermometer reading will be 175-180° when the roast is done.



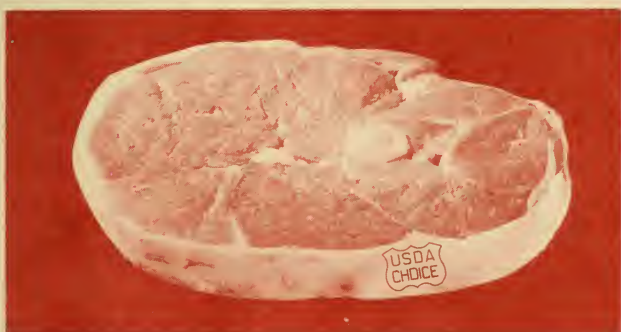
**RIB ROAST** This cut is the section used for making rib chops. The rib roast cut is sometimes called the “rack.”

You can fashion the rack into a “French roast” by removing about 1½ inches of meat from the

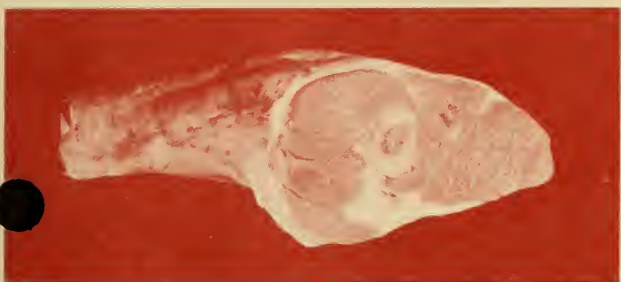
ends of the ribs. Then after roasting, cover rib ends with paper frills for a decorative touch.

The elegant "crown roast" is made with at least two rib roasts (racks), with the back bone removed, shaped into a crown and secured with twine. Ends of the ribs are trimmed so that they can be decorated like the French roast.

Any of these roasts, which are all fashioned from the same basic cut, are perfect for oven roasting. A rib or crown roast weighing 4-6 pounds (put in a 325° F. oven) will require approximately 35 minutes per pound cooking time. Your meat thermometer will read 175 to 180° when the roast is done.



**LEG STEAK** Leg steaks are lean meaty slices cut from the center area of the leg, and are easily identified by the round leg bone. This cut is suitable for broiling, pan-broiling, or panfrying.



**SHANKS** Economical and best prepared by simmering in liquid or braising, lamb shanks are also nutritious! Shank sections are delicious, too, in lamb stew. If prepared by braising, shanks will require approximately 1½ to 2 hours total cooking time.





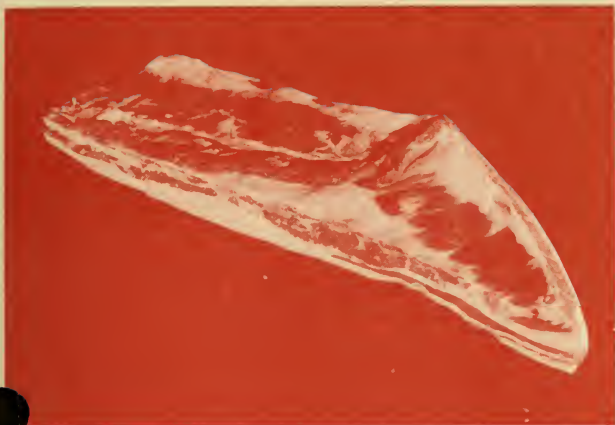
**SHOULDER ROAST** (Square-Cut and Boned and Rolled) The square-cut shoulder roast (on right in photo), identified easily by the arm and blade bones, is considered an economical cut of lamb.

The boned shoulder roast (on the left) is convenient to serve, and is commonly sold at retail as illustrated here—boned, rolled and tied. A boneless shoulder can also be fashioned into a cushion shoulder roast for stuffing.

Both shoulder roasts are suitable for oven roasting (preferably at a low temperature of 325° F., at 35-45 minutes per pound) OR suitable for braising (slowly browned and cooked with a small amount of liquid added). Cook to an internal temperature of 175-180°, as indicated by your meat thermometer.



**BLADE or ARM SHOULDER CHOPS** These cuts (from the shoulder roast) are fine for broiling, pan-broiling or panfrying. Preferably, for best results in cooking, they should be at least 1 inch thick. To broil a 1-inch chop requires a total cooking time of approximately 12 minutes.



**BREAST** The breast contains the rib bones and breast bone and is considered an economical buy. Often this cut is boned and rolled or boned for stuffing. A nice variation is to include fruit or vegetables in the stuffing. A less tender cut, the breast should be prepared by braising or simmering in liquid. When braising at a moderate oven temperature of 325° F., a boned and rolled breast roast requires 1½ to 2 hours total cooking time.



**RIBLETS** These economy lamb cuts are made from the breast by cutting between the rib bones. They are best prepared by braising (requiring an approximate total cooking time of 1½ to 2 hours) or simmering in liquid. They are also delicious when cooked over charcoal on the outdoor grill.

**\*SHISH KABOBS** Shish kabobs are cubes of boneless lamb usually cut from the shoulder or leg and skewered. They may be found prethreaded on wooden skewers in some retail stores or the lamb cubes may be sold in bulk. A favorite way to prepare lamb shish kabobs is to marinate the cubes for a period of several hours, then put them on long skewers to charcoal broil or oven broil.

**\*GROUND LAMB** Boneless lamb from the neck, breast, shanks and flank is generally used in making ground lamb. However, any part can be boned and ground. The ground lamb is best prepared as patties for broiling, pan-broiling, or panfrying—OR—as a lamb loaf for oven roasting.

\* Not illustrated.

## A FEW VARIATIONS

Although the terms above are standard, names for lamb cuts sometimes vary in different parts of the country. Other terms you may see include:

**English chop**—a double loin lamb chop;

**lamb cutlets**—meat from the lamb leg cut like round steak in beef;

**crown roast of lamb**—a formal-looking cut from the rib area;

**rack of lamb**—usually a restaurant item for two, from the rib;

**Saratoga chops**—boneless lamb chops from the inside shoulder muscles.



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